

December 4, 1990

Sam Smith
Pres. City Council

file

Dear Sir,

I would like to relate to you an unpleasant experience I had recently with the V.A. hospital in Seattle. For the sake of brevity I will start with the day I took my son to the hospital for drug and alcohol abuse. When we went in to see the counselor for admittance I watched my son in tears ask for help with his problem. He was told that there were no beds available but that he could return in two weeks. At this point I asked what he was suppose to do in the meanwhile, that he could be dead in that time. The response was that there was nothing that could be done, there just weren't any beds. My reply was, "Is this what you do with people that come in begging for help, tell them to come back in two weeks, no wonder people don't get help, when they get the nerve and circumstances to come for help you tell them to come back in two weeks!" I was then told to leave the room, supposedly so my son could answer questions himself. I left, but not before I stated that, "This is how you always deal with the truth, just push it out of the way!"

After she finished with my son she ran around for several minutes and then returned saying that she could get him in the psychiatric ward until a bed was available in the substance abuse program. I thanked her for her help eventhough I felt it should not have been necessary for me to get excited and argue the situation for my son, he came for help and he should have gotten it without a scene. Had this been the end of the story I would not have been motivated to write this letter, unfortunately this episode was only the precursor.

After three days it was decided that Derrick (my son) was not

December 4, 1990

mentally unbalanced and he was transferred to the substance abuse program in another section of the hospital. He had dried out some, he attitude was improving along with his appetite. Things seem to be going well, I stayed in contact with him and the hospital, and visited him as often as allowed to check on his progress as I tried to make plans for him after he had completed the program. After two weeks my husband and I went to the hospital to meet with his counselor and see if there was anything else we could do to aid in his recovery.

We met with his counselor, Marie Johnson, and she informed us that Derrick had been put out of the program for *being late to a couple of meetings*. Upon pressing her for more of an explanation, we were told that his attitude had something to do with it also. It seems all he did in his spare time was watch television! Needless to say I was flabbergasted by these statements, what does a recovering abuser do with their spare time, read 'War and Peace'? I simply could not believe this was the extent of his crimes, and that it should warrant dismissal from the program! When I questioned Derrick, he said he had been late for a couple of meetings because the doctor had given him a muscle relaxer and he over-slept. Furthermore, he was not told he was doing anything wrong or against the rules of the program, whatever they may be.

Upon pressing Marie Johnson she told me that a vote is taken on whether a person is put out of the program or not. I asked how this vote worked and was told that the staff and patients vote. The result of the vote on Derrick was 8 to 7 in favor of dismissal. The seven votes for him to stay came from the patients, all eight votes for dismissal, including the deciding vote cast by Ms. Johnson, came from the staff. Marie Johnson, his counselor stated to me that she thought Derrick was a sensitive and sincere


December 4, 1990

person. An empty statement considering her deciding vote, but one that falls in line with *their* attitude. As I reflected on the whole episode it triggered many thoughts as to what is going on there and around the country. In questioning Derrick about his stay of two weeks, he told me there were several cases of dismissal during his stay. How prevalent is this attitude toward veterans and how much does it contribute to the violence, hopelessness and death in America?

Although it is not going to do my son any good at this point, I am going to pursue this matter to my maximum ability until some sort of investigation is undertaken. I'm sure there are mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters across this country who have had to deal with this problem and if their experience is anything close to mine I think it is an outrage! Americans have given their all to serve this country and in their time of need, a time of desperation, when the only alternatives are despair or death, they are told to come back in two weeks or kicked out of a program they have volunteered for to get help! And yet we are outraged when a veteran goes out and kills a half dozen people, or goes crazy against his own family, or a school, or bank. How can we allow this attitude to exist in a hospital, the last stop for many along a long trail of despair! *HOW MANY DEATHS WILL IT TAKE TO MOTIVATE A SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM? HOW MANY INNOCENT PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO SUFFER?*

I would appreciate a reply as soon as possible as to what else I can do and what you intend to do about this situation. I am confident that I am not the only mother or family to have this experience.

SINCERELY,


NELLIE FLYNN

Dear Ms Flynn.

Thank you for info re of the
treatment you + your son received
~~at~~ ~~from~~ at the U. A. Hospital

I understand your strong feelings,
however, since the VA Hospital
does not fall under City regulations,
I am ~~referring~~ ^{referring} you to the
Congressman McDermott

+ requesting action
from him.

I do believe that Congressman
McDermott will be
responding to you.

I too, am a Veteran
+ would not appreciate
this kind of service.
YVT,
SS